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UN-OHRLLS

Opening Statement

by

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High Representative
and
Under-Secretary-General
Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries
and Small Island Developing States

at
the twentieth Meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal
Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea

10 June 2019

United Nations Headquarter, New York
Distinguished co-Chairs,
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to be here with you today and giving me the opportunity to say a few words at the opening of the twentieth meeting of the UN Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea.

First, congratulations to Ambassadors Beckles and Picco for leading this consultative process. Under your inspiring co-chairmanship, I am sure this meeting will be a success.

I come from a nation where the territory is comprised of ocean and land – and where the ocean surface is larger than the land surface!

One of the key aspects in better understanding, managing and protecting the ocean is scientific knowledge and its application. So, allow me to congratulate the member States on selecting this timely and important theme.

Ocean sciences have a key role to play in implementing the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, in particular sustainable development Goal 14. Yes, oceans cover 70 per cent of the Earth’s surface and yet 80 per cent of our oceans remain unmapped, unobserved, not fully understood, and unexplored. That is a big chunk and vital component of our earth’s ecosystem!

At the same time, dependence on our oceans is increasing due to the vital ecosystem services it provides globally, more than 3 billion people rely on the ocean for their livelihood. 97 per cent of fishermen live in developing countries and fishing is their main source for food and livelihood!

When you are an islander, you know how vital the ocean is to your life and it is good to see how we now have come to recognize that our oceans are facing multiple-threats and stressors.

Let me just allude to ocean acidification and pollution – that continue to alter the state of our ocean faster than nature’s ability to regenerate.

Most of the human body is comprised of water - water, our oceans are the greatest natural resource we all share and the time is now for ocean sciences to make a big push, to be given a big push. We must become much more knowledgeable about how our oceans "live" and how we must manage this wonderful yet fragile ecosystem.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will focus my few words on ocean science’s importance for our planet’s most vulnerable countries.

SDG 14.A is targeted at increasing the scientific knowledge of developing countries, and in particular, in small islands developing states and the least developed countries.
This target calls for increasing scientific knowledge, developing research capacity and transfer of marine technology.

It takes into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity.

The goal reflects commitments made in the SAMOA Pathway as well as the Istanbul Programme of Action. The SAMOA Pathway draws attention to the critical importance of marine scientific research and technology transfer for the SIDS.

The research and technology transfers called for are strategic for SIDS because they are key to addressing threats and stressors to the ocean stemming from climate change and ocean acidification. They are key to ocean conservation as well as the sustainable use of the oceans and its resources.

The SAMOA Pathway furthermore calls for action to develop technological capacity in the SIDS.

This entails the establishment of dedicated regional oceanographic centres and the provision of technical assistance notably for the delimitation of maritime areas and the preparation of submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

The SAMOA Pathway further calls to improve efforts to eradicate and control invasive alien species, a significant problem brought about by vessels traversing the ocean to the Port of SIDS.

The provision of support for research on and the development of new technologies by expanding collaboration and supporting existing regional and international structures is called for.

Now, island nations and their peoples through generations have always lived in harmony with both land and above all the oceans. As the saying goes "small nations but big ocean countries!

I wish to emphasize that enhancing the scientific knowledge and understanding of the oceans must tap into SIDS traditional knowledge as a major resource for tackling climate change, resilience building and developing adaptation strategies.

The UN Decade for Ocean Science could look at building bridges between the scientific community and SIDS communities to enhance and also enrich knowledge-sharing and know-how in addressing existing knowledge gaps.

It is equally important that marine scientific data and information collection, particularly those collected in areas under SIDS national jurisdiction, is carried out pursuant to the provisions of UNCLOS and Article 244 in particular. And it is a must that the transfer of knowledge resulting
from marine scientific research be disseminated to SIDS. The availability of accurate and timely data is also critical to inform policy-making pertaining to the management of maritime resources.

Allow me to say, decades of work on sustainable growth have shown that it is through participation and national and local ownership that things move!

Similarly, for LDCs, there are significant data gaps on the indicators of the SDG14 as well as related SDGs.

A key requirement is to strengthen the capacities of national statistics offices to provide detailed oceanographic data and related relevant data.

Investing in capacity building is urgent and LDCs require assistance to access and work with new technologies in ocean science.

I hope that the recent establishment and operationalization of the Technology Bank for LDCs will be a key player in this and help countries address their science, technology and innovation needs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The oceans are our shared heritage and our future.

Ocean conservation and sustainable use are important to all 8 billion people of our shared planet.

So, this includes the landlocked states.

Initiatives to deliver on SDG 14 must include the landlocked countries.

We must build the capacity of the landlocked countries to participate in ocean science. Enhanced participation of LLDCs in marine research should be one of the key sectors for new partnerships. The UNCLOS provides for the participation of landlocked and geographically disadvantaged States in marine scientific research being conducted in neighbouring coastal States’ waters.

OHRLLs in collaboration with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) organized a side event last year on Enhancing the role of Women in marine deep-sea scientific research to achieve the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the vulnerable countries. The event was aimed at raising awareness and to discuss ways to improve full and equal access and participation of women in marine deep-sea scientific research through capacity building. OHRLLs will continue its advocacy on this front on behalf of the vulnerable countries.

Healthy oceans and seas are at the core of a sustainable future for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs and really for all of us.
2019 is an important year for small island developing states. Five years have already elapsed since the adoption of the SAMOA Pathway and I will not even mention how many years have elapsed since the Barbados Conference, the first ever for SIDS.

Time for action is now, not tomorrow or the day after.

The General Assembly will hold a one-day high level review on the 27 September 2019 in the margins of the General Assembly high-level week, in New York. The SAMOA mid-term review provides us all a strategic opportunity to deepen discussions on some of the elements you may be touching upon here this week.

The ongoing BBNJ process has immense scope to further international cooperation and coordination in addressing the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction taking into account the special requirements of vulnerable countries – including addressing questions of the sharing of benefits, capacity building and the transfer of marine technology.

What you do and discuss is vital to all of us and so I wish you every success in your consultations.

I look forward to the outcomes.

Thank you.